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Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

The responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity

Security Council
Seventy-third year

Responsibility to protect: from early warning to early action

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

Despite progress in implementing the principle of the responsibility to protect, the international community continues to fall short where it matters most: the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity[1] and the protection of vulnerable populations. On the ground, trends continue to move in the wrong direction and civilians are paying the price with their lives. This problem exists not because the principle is weak or misplaced, but because the international community has been insufficiently resolute in its implementation and has allowed disagreements about the past to foil unity of purpose in the present.

It costs far more to pick up the pieces after crisis than it does to prevent crisis. Effective atrocity prevention must therefore be situated within the larger efforts of the international community to prevent crisis and suffering. The conditions in which atrocities occur should never even arise. In the meantime, however, everything

[1] In the present report, these crimes are referred to collectively as "atrocity crimes". The term "atrocity crimes" is used to refer only to the four acts specified in paragraph 138 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome (General Assembly resolution 60/1). Genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity are defined in international criminal law, including in articles 5 to 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Ethnic cleansing, while not established as a distinct crime, includes acts that can amount to one of those crimes, in particular genocide and crimes against humanity.

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possible must be done to help countries to avert atrocity crimes, including improving systems for early warning and moving more quickly from warning to early action. To that end, the present report shows how early warning and assessment can be further improved and outlines a three-fold strategy for strengthening early action: first, by reviewing and, where necessary, strengthening existing preventive capacities; second, by continuing to promote accountability for atrocity prevention; and third, by innovating through significantly expanding civilian action for atrocity prevention and drawing upon all available resources to meet this most pressing of challenges.

In the 2005 World Summit Outcome (General Assembly resolution 60/1), Member States agreed that each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity and that the international community should, as appropriate, encourage and help States to exercise this responsibility and support the United Nations in establishing an early warning capability. The present report shows how the United Nations and its partners can work together to better prevent atrocity crimes.

I. Introduction

1. The responsibility to protect challenges us to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, when too little was done to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity and protect vulnerable populations. Preventing genocide, crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international law is an important part of the work of the United Nations. In my previous report on implementing the responsibility to protect (A/71/1016-S/2017/556), the need to focus on practical steps to make atrocity prevention a living reality was underlined.

2. Over the past year, efforts have been made to realize some of the recommendations in that report. The General Assembly has placed the responsibility to protect on the formal agenda of its seventy-second session. Informal dialogue has taken place among Member States about how to improve the use of the universal periodic review process of the Human Rights Council to support atrocity prevention. More than 60 Member States have reviewed or adopted mechanisms to strengthen resilience to atrocity crimes, including by appointing national focal points for the responsibility to protect. I was pleased to learn about the positive outcome of the annual meeting of national focal points, held in Qatar in 2017, and look forward to the following meeting, which will take place in Finland in June 2018. Many States are continuing to explore and establish national arrangements to strengthen their capacity to prevent atrocity crimes, thereby increasing their resilience to such crimes. Parliamentarians, national human rights institutions and ombudspersons, through their international networks, have also explored how they might contribute to risk assessment, due diligence and national accountability mechanisms. Civil society continues to support atrocity prevention and urge national authorities to fulfil their responsibilities. Religious leaders are taking an active role in preventing incitement that could lead to atrocity crimes.

3. However, the international community continues to fall short where it matters most: the prevention of atrocity crimes and the protection of vulnerable populations. In the previous report, it was noted that trends were moving in the wrong direction, and they continue to do so. Since 2005, reported battle-related deaths have increased ten-fold[2] and the number of people forcibly displaced has reached record levels. Civilians increasingly find themselves in the middle of armed conflict. The gap between our words of commitment and the experience of vulnerable populations around the world has grown. No single country can solve the problems we face, such as conflict, climate change and migration, on its own. There is a need to strengthen international cooperation and multilateral institutions to respond to the dramatic challenges of today's crises. There has been a troubling decline in the international commitment to multilateralism and respect for international human rights and humanitarian and refugee law. The international community needs to make its deeds match its words by committing the necessary political support and resources to multilateral institutions, including the United Nations.

4. Effective atrocity prevention means doing everything possible to help countries to avert the outbreak of atrocity crimes. This requires the prioritization of early warning and early action. Implementing the responsibility to protect is an important part of my broader strategy for prioritizing prevention within the United Nations. I believe it is vital that prevention cuts across all pillars of the work of the United Nations and unites us for more effective delivery.

[2] See Marie Allansson, Erik Melander and Lotta Themnér, "Organized violence, 1989–2016", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 54, No. 4 (July 2017); and Ralph Sundberg, Kristine Eck and Joakim Kreutz, "Introducing the UCDP non-State conflict dataset", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 49, No. 2 (2012).

5. Early action is the essence of the responsibility to protect. The principle's first pillar refers to the primary responsibility of States to protect all populations within their territory from atrocity crimes. Many States are able to fulfil their responsibility owing primarily to inhibitors built into their institutions and societies that ensure that the factors that can give rise to atrocities are mitigated well before they escalate into violence (see A/67/929-S/2013/399 and A/69/981-S/2015/500) and that help States to cope with periods of stress (see A/69/947-S/2014/449). National action under the first pillar requires the periodic assessment of risks and opportunities. National efforts can be supplemented by the action of regional and other organizations and arrangements to assist States under the second pillar of the principle. However, early warning and assessment do not by themselves trigger early action, and the best results are achieved when early warning is followed by a focus on early action.

6. We must mobilize the resources at our disposal and broaden the constituency of actors engaged in atrocity prevention to include not only those with the greatest responsibility to protect populations but also those who are in the best position to support effective action, including mediators, human rights defenders, experts and monitors, religious and traditional elders, business leaders, youth representatives, activists, journalists and professionals. We must ensure that women are represented equally in peace processes and empowered and supported as agents of atrocity prevention. I have stressed that inclusive and sustainable development is not only a goal in itself but also our best form of prevention against all kinds of risks, including the risk of atrocity crimes. We should step up our efforts to help countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and leave no one behind.

7. We must also make better use of existing human rights mechanisms, such as the special procedures of the Human Rights Council, the treaty bodies and the universal periodic review process, and their recommendations in support of Member States. Atrocity prevention must be simultaneously top down and bottom up, connecting every level of government and society, regional and subregional arrangements and the United Nations. Prevention invariably succeeds through partnerships cultivated over time. We must plan and prepare now in order to establish the relationships we may need to make prevention successful in the future. The present report outlines practical steps for achieving these goals.

8. In preparing the present report, my Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect consulted widely. In addition to inviting inputs from participants at a number of events, my Special Adviser engaged with Member States and State networks. The report was informed by the responses to a questionnaire that was sent to Member States, civil society organizations, national human rights institutions and networks of parliamentarians and ombudspersons.

II. Early warning

9. The international community's capacity for early warning and assessment of the risks of atrocity crimes has significantly improved over the past few years. Within the United Nations, the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes, developed by the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, provides a comprehensive guide to detecting atrocity risks. It is being increasingly used across the United Nations system, as well as by Member States and civil society organizations. Member States have recommended integrating the Framework into existing peacekeeping operational guidance, and the Office is working to develop new products that will make it easier for United Nations field operations and other partners to utilize the Framework in support of Member States.

10. My Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect continue to monitor situations and advise me on the presence of atrocity risks. They have a crucial role in the United Nations system. The Human Rights Up Front initiative is aimed at strengthening the capacity of the United Nations system to prevent serious human rights violations, including those that could lead to atrocity crimes, and sounding the alarm before abuses can escalate into atrocity crimes. The regional monthly reviews under the initiative provide opportunities to share information and make integrated, cross-pillar assessments to ensure coherent responses to emerging situations of concern. As a consequence, United Nations entities are better able to inform the Organization's decision-making bodies and Member States about situations of concern and options for prevention.

11. Several Member States have strengthened their capacity to detect the early warning signs of atrocity crimes at home and abroad and adjust national policies accordingly. For example, the Governments of Cambodia and the United Republic of Tanzania have examined how early warning assessments and prevention programming might be incorporated into development partnerships to enable their communities and international partners to work together to identify and mitigate risks. These are encouraging developments, but more could be done, including by national human rights institutions or ombudspersons, which could conduct their own periodic risk assessments.

12. Early warning and assessment should also be integrated into foreign, defence, development, trade and economic policies, as some Member States have already begun to do. For example, the Atrocities Prevention Board developed by the United States of America aims to provide a cross-government approach to early warning that can identify risks and inform policy to prevent and respond to atrocities. Other Governments have developed their own processes. The Governments of Australia, Colombia and the Republic of Korea, for example, provide training for their officials on the identification of the risk factors associated with atrocity crimes. Many States utilize their national focal point for the responsibility to protect for this purpose.

13. Regional and subregional arrangements have also taken steps to strengthen their capacity for early warning and assessment. The African Union has taken steps to enhance the capacity of its Continental Early Warning System to anticipate and respond effectively to emerging crises, including those exhibiting the risk of atrocity crimes. The European Union, building upon the adoption in 2016 of its Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, has reviewed its early warning system to include risks of atrocity crimes and shift the emphasis to early action and is finalizing a toolkit to help to identify early warning signs and devise policy options to prevent atrocity crimes. The Division for the Prevention of Conflicts, Rule of Law and Security Sector Reform, Integrated Approach, Stabilization and Mediation of the European External Action Service provides training on early warning and assessment to civilians and soldiers deployed in its overseas missions. I will ensure that the United Nations strengthens channels of communication with these initiatives.

14. Civil society organizations have also contributed to the strengthening of early warning and assessment, for example, by providing timely reports that track emerging and ongoing situations. National civil society organizations also make an important contribution. Global and regional networks make important contributions to early warning and assessment that can inform policy development by national authorities.

15. In practice, assessments of the risks of atrocity crimes benefit from assessments by other mechanisms, such as those focusing on the prevention of human rights violations and conflict. Within the United Nations, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) plays an indispensable role in warning of situations where serious human rights violations are being committed and

early indicators, such as patterns of violations linked to systematic discrimination against individuals or groups. Most atrocity crimes occur within a context of armed conflict. As such, conflict risk analysis, such as that conducted by the Department of Political Affairs, is significant in guiding and/or contributing to assessments of the risks of atrocity crimes and is especially useful for identifying situations where preventive measures, such as preventive diplomacy or mediation, might be necessary

16. There has been progress in the design and implementation of early warning mechanisms, including by regional arrangements. The Early Warning and Response Network of the Economic Community of West African States constitutes a good example. Nevertheless, situations remain where insufficient warning is given. This is sometimes, albeit rarely, because crises erupt without being detected in advance. More often the problem lies in the ineffective communication of warning signs. It often transpires after the event that individuals or organizations were aware of the risks. Further improvements must therefore be made to eliminate these problems from early warning and assessment systems. My Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect will hold consultations across the United Nations system and put forward practical proposals to address the following three steps that the United Nations system must take:

(a) First, continue to develop a more systematic and structured approach to information gathering, early warning, assessment and the dissemination of analysis and advice so that Member States are provided with earlier and better recommendations for early action. This can be done, for example, by building upon the work undertaken through the Human Rights Up Front initiative;

(b) Second, sharpen its integrated analytical and risk assessment capacities, in particular those focused specifically on the prevention of atrocity crimes;

(c) Third, support regional arrangements and Member States in developing effective early warning systems.

17. Early warning must be systematically linked to decision-making about early action. While global capacity has progressed significantly, the connectedness of assessments to decision-making has not kept pace. We must establish mechanisms capable of connecting Member States, regional arrangements and the United Nations system and bringing relevant analysis swiftly to the attention of the highest decision-making bodies. The United Nations still has much to do to connect its own capacities for early warning and assessment with mechanisms for early action. I will continue to bring situations where I see an imminent risk of atrocity crimes to the attention of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council.

III. Early action

18. Warnings are effective only if followed by action. Early action saves lives, prevents the long-term economic, social, humanitarian and other forms of damage wrought by atrocity crimes and protects fundamental human rights. In most circumstances, it is taken in partnership with the relevant national authorities. In addition, studies have shown that early action for atrocity prevention is more effective when part of a broad-based effort undertaken by local, national, regional and global actors from a wide range of sectors.

19. When done effectively with the right combination of carefully tailored measures, early action strengthens national sovereignty and reduces the need for further measures. Risk-mitigating measures could involve the early convening of different sets of actors in various situations, ensuring complementarity and cooperation among them and regularly monitoring and evaluating progress. This is

best achieved through proactive partnerships that can be called to action when necessary, including by building relationships through regular dialogue, the temporary exchange of officials between organizations and joint exercises.

20. Through experience, we have learned important lessons about the factors that contribute to effective early action, including the following:

(a) Preventive action should be focused and context specific. Measures are most effective when they are individualized and focused on addressing specific problems or influencing specific individuals;

(b) Leadership matters at every level. Atrocity prevention works best when it addresses risks at the local level as soon as they become evident, working in parallel with the national and international levels when needed. When atrocity crimes are imminent, the degree to which global actors can make a difference depends on whether local and national leaders are willing to cooperate. As such, local ownership is critical, and early action succeeds only if it enjoys the support of the intended beneficiaries. International leadership matters too, since early action to prevent atrocities is more likely and more effective when States with the legitimacy and capacity to lead do so;

(c) Timing matters. Underlying risk factors must be addressed early. Windows of opportunity close when crises emerge. Once societies plunge into instability, the political and temporal space to effectively address underlying risks shrinks rapidly and sometimes disappears entirely. It is important to ensure that measures to address risks are constantly assessed and adapted as needed;

(d) The prevention of atrocity crimes is supported by other agendas. The risks of atrocity crimes can be reduced by mutually reinforcing activities in other areas, including efforts to improve the capacity of State institutions for early action, to promote and protect human rights, including by eliminating all forms of discrimination, to strengthen the independence and oversight functions of rule of law institutions, and to support accountability for past atrocity crimes to prevent their recurrence. The most effective approaches to atrocity prevention are those that are inclusive, integrated, adaptive, flexible, collaborative and sustained;

(e) Effective prevention builds upon existing resilience. Most societies contain inhibitors of atrocity crimes and sources of resilience as well as risk. The most effective and cost-efficient approaches to atrocity prevention identify and support existing sources of resilience within a community. In my recent report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace (A/72/707-S/2018/43), I sought to forge a common vision and common systems and capacities across the United Nations to support Member States in sustaining peace and building resilient and prosperous nations in line with their commitment to leave no one behind in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals;

(f) Unity and resolve are key. Atrocity prevention works by influencing actors to think again before committing atrocity crimes. The capacity of international actors to influence is greatly affected by the communication of unity and resolve. As disunity weakens credibility, breeds impunity and encourages atrocity crimes, it is imperative that the international community acts in a united and concerted fashion when confronted with a high risk of atrocity crimes in any situation;

(g) Partnerships are crucial. The United Nations accomplishes little without regional and national partners. Likewise, partners can benefit from associating their work with United Nations agendas. Yet relatively few national and local policymakers, religious and opinion leaders, parliamentarians, entrepreneurs and educators are aware of the responsibility to protect and its implications.

21. As early action is strengthened, lesson learning to guide future practice must become more systematic. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect is leading a lessons-learned exercise based on case studies to gain an understanding of the impact of preventive actions in past cases. Based on this research, a lessons-learned study will be published in the second half of 2018. After the effectiveness of the recommendations has been tested evidence-based guidelines that identify the tools and approaches most suitable to different kinds of situations will be developed and shared by the end of 2019 as a living document reflecting new lessons learned.

22. In order to improve practice, the United Nations must also reflect on its failures and improve its understanding of its successes. More than two decades ago, reports on the failures of the Organization in Srebrenica and Rwanda propelled Member States to establish a dedicated capacity for genocide prevention in the United Nations system and adopt and commit themselves to implementing the responsibility to protect. It would be timely to consider lessons from current situations and crises where the United Nations has been made aware of imminent risks of atrocity crimes. All too often, early warning of atrocity crimes is not followed by early action, and crucial windows of opportunity are not fully exploited.

23. To address these challenges, Member States should review and strengthen existing preventive capacities, ensure that there is accountability for atrocity prevention and innovate by significantly expanding the contribution of civilian actors to atrocity prevention.

A. Strengthen existing capacities

24. As a starting point, existing capacities must be better utilized to prevent atrocity crimes. Preventive action starts with the State, which has the primary responsibility to protect all populations within its territory from such crimes. The ratification and domestication of basic instruments of international law that relate to the prohibition and prevention of atrocity crimes and the protection of populations are important steps towards realizing a country's commitment to setting the necessary legal foundation to take preventive action.[3] The Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes is designed to help States to conduct risk and resilience assessments and identify areas where they could strengthen their capacities to prevent atrocity crimes, with assistance as necessary.

25. Early action to prevent atrocities is most effective when regional and subregional arrangements play a supportive role. These arrangements can assist with early action by supporting Governments in establishing the necessary mechanisms. When risks become more acute, they can support national action to address these risks and work with the United Nations and other relevant actors to resolve conflicts that could lead to atrocity crimes. Regional arrangements are well placed to lead efforts through monitoring and observation activities, by offering recommendations on how to reduce risks and prevent triggering factors that may lead to escalation and by

[3] These instruments include the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Second Optional Protocol thereto (1989); International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights; Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereto; Convention on the Rights of the Child; Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court; Arms Trade Treaty.

supporting national authorities to take the necessary steps. Regional arrangements could, when necessary, support collective action to prevent atrocity crimes.

26. The General Assembly remains the most comprehensive and inclusive vehicle for the implementation of the responsibility to protect, in particular in recommending preventive measures for Member States when needed. The Assembly should continue to reflect on lessons learned and set future priorities and directions. It is also important to assess the results of actions taken to prevent atrocity crimes and to adjust measures to take into account experience in the field.

27. Addressing the root causes of systemic patterns of discrimination and human rights violations is likely to make a difference. The United Nations human rights system has a significant, yet underutilized role in this regard. It provides an established legal framework of universal norms and mechanisms through which the international community can assist States to address issues that, if left unaddressed, increase the risk of atrocity crimes. The universal periodic review process of the Human Rights Council, its special procedures and the treaty bodies often identify early warning signs years before risks become imminent. Likewise, fact-finding missions, commissions of inquiry and investigations mandated by the Human Rights Council help to identify specific sources of risk, including individuals and groups who may be responsible for preparing and orchestrating atrocity crimes, and prevent recurrence. The Human Rights Council is therefore well placed to recommend measures to prevent situations from escalating towards atrocity crimes and highlight situations that ought to be addressed by the Security Council, as it has already done.

28. In paragraph 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome, the Security Council's special responsibility for the prevention of atrocity crimes was affirmed. In the past, the Council sometimes responded to situations only after atrocity crimes had been committed. It has, however, taken initiatives that contribute to early action. For example, it has increasingly invited and received briefings from my Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. Initiatives such as Arria formula briefings, Council missions to conflict-affected countries, open thematic debates, situational awareness briefings and wrap-up sessions should all strengthen the Council's effectiveness in prevention efforts. The Council could consider how existing measures could be employed to prevent atrocity crimes. When risks of atrocity crimes are identified, the Council could utilize instruments at its disposal to better ascertain the situation and guide its decision-making.

29. Risks of atrocity crimes should be addressed through concerted and coordinated action by United Nations field presences. It is important to ensure that field presences understand the risks of atrocity crimes, consider how their work might support prevention and reinforce resilience, and communicate their concerns clearly and effectively to local partners and relevant United Nations mandate holders. Field presences should be configured to respond as effectively as possible to evolving situations. When risks of atrocity crimes are high, United Nations peace operations, country teams and OHCHR field presences play important roles in helping States and societies to reduce tensions and address underlying issues. There is also a need to strengthen the protection of civilian activities by peacekeeping operations through the implementation of the recommendations of recent reviews (see, for example, A/70/357-S/2015/683) and the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians with the support of the United Nations network of regional offices.

B. Promote accountability

30. Strengthening accountability remains an essential part of my strategy for atrocity prevention. In my previous report (A/71/1016-S/2017/556), I underscored the need to change the way we think about atrocity prevention and ensure that States, which have the primary responsibility for preventing atrocity crimes, are held accountable to their populations. National parliaments and human rights institutions can hold Governments accountable by reviewing measures to prevent atrocity crimes and ensuring that Governments implement relevant recommendations made by the United Nations human rights bodies and other relevant national and international obligations and commitments and allocate sufficient resources to relevant programmes and action plans. States and intergovernmental mechanisms have a responsibility to assist States in fulfilling their primary responsibility to protect populations and to adopt measures, when necessary, to prevent atrocity crimes.

31. The Security Council, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council should consider ways to better utilize the tools at their disposal to strengthen international accountability for atrocity crimes.

32. States have put forward proposals for strengthening the effectiveness and transparency of the working methods of the Security Council as it responds to the threat and commission of atrocity crimes, such as those proposed by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group and the Governments of France and Mexico.

C. Innovate for prevention through civilian action

33. The primary responsibility for the prevention of atrocity crimes lies with the State. In order to close the gap between early warning and early action, however, we must recognize the potential contribution of other actors. We must further develop and better harness the civilian capacities of international organizations and regional and subregional arrangements for atrocity prevention, as well as the immense capacities that lay outside the State. In both the State and non-State sectors we must engender a spirit of global activism for atrocity prevention. We need to harness this immense capacity, connect it with national, regional and international efforts, and foster a global expansion of civilian action for atrocity prevention.

34. Civilian action makes an important contribution to prevention. I receive frequent reports about how civilian action, whether undertaken by formal institutions, civil society groups, the private sector or courageous individuals, has helped to ease tensions and prevent violence, including atrocity crimes, in different parts of the world. Civilian action works by establishing and maintaining community expectations of appropriate behaviour, identifying and repudiating actions that fall short of those standards, bearing witness to violations and defending human rights through supporting the rule of law and legal accountability and through searching for practical solutions to disputes. It helps to create the means needed to constructively manage diversity and peacefully resolve tensions, promoting a plurality of views and the open exchange of information and opinions. Some action provides for basic human needs, supports livelihoods, challenges inequalities and discrimination, counters hate speech, suppresses risk factors at their source and keeps vulnerable populations safe. In civilian action we have a massive, yet underutilized resource for atrocity prevention.

35. The United Nations has a wide range of civilian capacities that could be better utilized for atrocity prevention, and I have offered my good offices in a number of situations to help parties to conflicts to resolve their differences. The mandate holders

within the United Nations on genocide prevention, the responsibility to protect, the prevention of sexual violence in armed conflict, the protection of children in armed conflict and the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons, all play a critical role in that regard. Consistent with my policy of improving integration within the United Nations, these mandates are consolidating their capacities and expertise to undertake prevention work, including preventing atrocity crimes. Peace operations can help local political leaders to find negotiated solutions and assist them in implementing their agreements and eschewing atrocity crimes. The Mediation Support Unit of the Department of Political Affairs supports peacemaking efforts across the globe, providing United Nations envoys and other senior mediators with mediation expertise and technical assistance.

36. Human rights presences and mechanisms of the Human Rights Council, including its special procedures and the commissions of inquiry, play critical roles in monitoring or investigating situations of concern, identifying sources of potential future risk and working with States and civil society to address problems and devise solutions early on the basis of a legal framework of accepted norms. Peacebuilding activities bring States together with national and international stakeholders to identify and agree upon relevant priorities towards shared goals and reduce the risks of lapse or relapse into conflict. Refugee protection overseen by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees helps to place vulnerable individuals and groups out of immediate danger of becoming victims of atrocity crimes. Through their proximity to crisis-affected populations, humanitarian actors can identify protection risks and contribute to preventing and responding to protection concerns.

37. Over the past few years, regional arrangements have demonstrated their significant capacity to use diplomacy and mediation to resolve tensions, undertake human rights monitoring, help to manage and oversee elections, support peacebuilding and institutional capacity-building, provide and facilitate humanitarian relief, and coordinate responses to displacement. With their unique practical capacities, regional arrangements foster inclusive approaches to prevention and promote regional ownership.

38. From past experience, there was much that individual States could have done to minimize the risks of atrocity crimes, such as leveraging bilateral relations with other States. States have at their disposal peaceful means to influence behaviour, such as long-standing diplomatic relations, foreign aid and refugee policies, and a range of other policies relating to trade, travel and functional cooperation. Diplomatic measures can be used to respond to specific sources of threats, such as the use of hate speech, incitement or the targeting of particular groups. States can utilize informal networks to coordinate and advocate early action to prevent atrocity crimes and lead efforts through the regional arrangements and global institutions to which they belong. States could also contribute by increasing their capacity to support civilian action for atrocity prevention through civilian agencies or rosters of experts and increased investment in development aid and humanitarian action, and by encouraging and facilitating action by civil society and the private sector.

39. Civil society organizations have made significant contributions to atrocity prevention. International civil society organizations contribute to setting standards, providing technical expertise, carrying out investigations and holding Governments accountable. Non-governmental humanitarian organizations provide assistance that can sometimes mean the difference between life and death.

40. Within affected countries and regions, the actions of civil society organizations, journalists, the business sector and individuals with a leadership role, including religious leaders, have served to prevent violations, strengthen resilience and reduce tensions. They can help to address some of the underlying causes of atrocity crimes,

reduce the risk of escalation and alert the world to emerging risks. For example, the Nobel Prize-winning Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet, comprising civil society organizations representing organized labour, the private sector, the legal profession and human rights advocates, navigated the country peacefully through a difficult and dangerous political transition. In 2013, civil society and business groups in Kenya played a pivotal role in supporting prevention. Around the world, human rights defenders risk their lives to ensure that rights are respected, reporting violations and advocating on behalf of victims. More broadly, a strong and representative civil society that nurtures a plurality of different views and defends the right of groups to hold and express alternative perspectives while challenging hate speech and incitement is a crucial component of atrocity prevention (see A/63/677, paras. 17, 27, 37, 43–45, 47 and 59).

41. I reiterate the need to strengthen the role of women in the prevention of atrocity crimes. Research has shown that gender equality and the full inclusion of women in peace processes and as preventive actors greatly reduce a society's exposure to the risks of violence, including atrocity crimes. Yet women remain underrepresented in not only conflict prevention and peacemaking but also the prevention of atrocity crimes. Atrocity prevention must fully reflect Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and all subsequent resolutions, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, and meet the targets of Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals. We must prioritize ending all forms of gender-based discrimination and empower women as agents of atrocity prevention. My Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect will work with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, relevant mandate holders and regional actors to achieve this goal.

42. When we think holistically about civilian action to prevent atrocity crimes, it becomes clear that there is immense latent capacity that we have yet to harness and invest in. If all these resources and diverse actors could be consistently mobilized, we could create a path from early warning to early action. Despite the recognition that local resilience and receptiveness are crucial to early prevention, efforts to nurture these capacities remain ad hoc and limited, and the capacity of the international community to contribute civilian capacity to address the risks of atrocity crimes remains modest.

43. Since civilian action can make a real difference, in order to spearhead this new initiative, my Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect will consult with Member States, regional and subregional arrangements and civil society on options for strengthening civilian action for atrocity prevention. The international community has much to gain by supporting this important new initiative.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

44. **While we have made political and institutional progress in our efforts to implement the responsibility to protect, we are confronting a widening gap between our responsibilities and the daily experience of vulnerable populations around the world. All too often, we fail to translate early warnings of atrocity crimes into decisive early action to prevent them. I call upon all States to back their commitments with action. In the present report, measures have been identified to improve our response and initiate programmes of work that will strengthen atrocity prevention in practice.**

45. **States have the primary responsibility to protect and are well placed to take the earliest action to prevent atrocity crimes. I encourage Member States to consider the following measures:**

(a) **Appoint a senior official to serve as a national focal point for the responsibility to protect to coordinate national activities, share good practices and spearhead cooperation;**

(b) **Sign, ratify and implement the basic instruments of international law relating to the prohibition and prevention of atrocity crimes and the protection of populations, especially the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. In addition, the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides an opportunity for States to reaffirm their commitment to the protection of all human rights and the elimination of all forms of discrimination. States should strengthen the implementation of their legal obligations in this regard, including those enshrined in the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;**

(c) **Review national processes for early warning and assessment of atrocity crimes and, where necessary, strengthen them, including by introducing an integrated national early warning information system for atrocity prevention. Early warning and assessment should also be integrated into foreign, defence, trade, economic and development policies;**

(d) **Conduct a national assessment of the risks of and resilience to atrocity crimes using the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes developed by the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. Assessments should be regular and comprehensive and include the identification of vulnerable populations. In order to translate assessments into practical action for prevention, Member States should take the steps necessary to support national prevention efforts and strengthen national resilience. States should invite assistance, if needed, to develop its capacities;**

(e) **Support and implement initiatives to improve training, operational readiness and the efficiency of peace operations, acknowledging in this regard the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians;**

(f) **Strengthen accountability for atrocity prevention by implementing the recommendations I proposed in 2017. In particular, parliaments and national human rights institutions should establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that Governments are fulfilling their responsibility to protect both at home and abroad. National parliaments should use risk assessments to inform debates about the prevention of atrocity crimes and their oversight of the Government's prevention activities;**

(g) **Cooperate with my Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect in the development of options to strengthen civilian action to prevent atrocity crimes. Member States should systematically review and, where necessary, strengthen their capacity for early civilian action for atrocity prevention, and invest more resources and political support in this area.**

46. **Regional and subregional arrangements have unique and vitally important roles to play in the prevention of atrocity crimes. I strongly urge them to:**

(a) **Establish or further develop regional capacity for early warning and assessment of atrocity crimes. Regional entities and the United Nations should**

explore ways to improve the transmission of information and analysis to facilitate coordinated assessments and responses;

(b) Support early action to prevent atrocities by reviewing and enhancing their preventive capacities, including their capacities to monitor and observe emerging situations, propose measures for risk mitigation, negotiate and mediate disputes, and influence national authorities to take the necessary steps;

(c) Support their member States to build the early warning and assessment capacities they need to identify and respond effectively to risks of atrocity crimes;

(d) Cooperate with my Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect on the development of options to strengthen civilian action to prevent atrocity crimes, providing the necessary political and financial support.

47. In the 2005 World Summit Outcome, Member States clearly indicated that the international community, through the United Nations, has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means, in accordance with Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, to help to protect populations from atrocity crimes. To this end I encourage:

(a) The General Assembly to extend its consideration of the progress of implementation of the responsibility to protect by making it a standing agenda item. It should continue to make recommendations about the steps that can be taken to prevent atrocity crimes in specific situations and, where needed, establish appropriate mechanisms to support them. Given that the commission of atrocity crimes represents a threat to international peace and security, when the Security Council fails to act, the General Assembly should consider the options set out in the Charter to include situations of concern on its agenda and recommend measures that could be taken;

(b) The Security Council to consider ways to better utilize the tools at its disposal to prevent atrocity crimes and to strengthen international accountability for such crimes;

(c) The Human Rights Council to continue its consideration of human rights and atrocity prevention and how this might be strengthened. Specifically, the Council could continue to explore ways of making better use of the universal periodic review for atrocity prevention and utilize fact-finding missions, special procedures and commissions of inquiry to support atrocity prevention and legal accountability for atrocity crimes.

48. Effective prevention requires the active participation of civil society, the business sector, religious and traditional leaders and individuals. I encourage civil society actors, both national and global, to redouble their efforts to support the efforts of Member States on atrocity prevention.

49. The responsibility to protect demands that all of us do what we can to prevent atrocity crimes. The United Nations remains ready to support Member States in their efforts to exercise this responsibility, for example, by:

(a) Publishing and disseminating evidence-based guidelines on atrocity prevention for practitioners in 2019, based on lessons learned from past and ongoing atrocity prevention work;

(b) Strengthening our capacity for early warning and assessment of the risks of atrocity crimes, focusing on the priority areas of information-sharing and assessment, mainstreaming the atrocity prevention lens and strengthening

proactive partnerships between the United Nations and regional arrangements. I encourage the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to work with the Special Advisers to develop and implement ways of ensuring that risks of atrocity crimes are routinely recognized and assessed, that relevant assessments are shared and that steps are taken to better utilize human rights field presences to support atrocity prevention goals;

(c) Enabling the United Nations mandate holders on genocide prevention, the responsibility to protect, the prevention of sexual violence in armed conflict, the protection of children in armed conflict and the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons to work together more closely to address risks that could lead to atrocity crimes;

(d) Continuing to report on progress towards the implementation of the responsibility to protect and to bring situations of imminent risk of atrocity crimes to the attention of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council as needed;

(e) Through the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, developing and implementing a more systematic approach to learning lessons from both successful and unsuccessful atrocity prevention experiences;

(f) Articulating a comprehensive plan on the basis of extensive consultation to strengthen civilian action for atrocity prevention. This will include the further review and utilization of United Nations capacities;

(g) Strengthening the incorporation of relevant elements of the women and peace and security agenda and other related treaties and programmes into the United Nations strategies and policies for atrocity prevention. This includes taking concrete steps to prioritize work towards ending all forms of gender-based discrimination and to empower women as agents of atrocity prevention.